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AN ADDRESS
DELIVERED BY
COL. ARTHUR HERBERT
"ON THE
Fiftieth Anniversary
OF THE
OCCUPATION OF ALEXANDRIA
BY THE
FEDERAL TROOPS,
MAY 24, 1861.

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THE
Fiftieth Anniversary
OF
May 24, 1861

In response to a request of my old comrades I am here to recall some memories of a past, fast fading into oblivion, namely, the 24th day of May 1861, when upon the arrival of the U. S. troops, the Alexandria Battalion afterwards merged into the 17th Virginia Infantry evacuated the town.

Just fifty years ago without hardly a moment's warning, they marched away not knowing what the future had in store for them, or for those most dear they were leaving behind.

The partings at their homes and upon the streets, first severance of all life's closest ties on that fateful day in May, may be imagined but not described, between husbands and wives, mothers and sons, maidens and lovers, the pleading words and kisses of children who felt the unusual strain, but could not understand its far-reaching significance.

No Spartan women of old gave up their nearest and dearest, with more loyalty or heroism ; bright were the smiles that hid the aching hearts, cheery were the words of farewell. They kept back their tears for the silence of their own chambers and the eyes of an all-pitying God.

So on this decoration day, as has been our custom, we meet to keep green the memory of the men who gave their lives for their State and the cause that meant so much to them and to us.

We strew their graves with flowers, we hang fresh garlands upon yonder monument raised to perpetuate this great epoch in our history, and upon its base we chisel the names of the men we wish to honor; men of self-abnegation and deeds of daring. On such occasions also the cause for which they surrendered life and all that was dear has been discussed and defended.

I propose not to enter upon that, to-day, but will rest their cause and its issue, with the Judge of all the Earth who knoweth the hearts of all men and who alone judgeth rigtheously.

Sunday, the day before the evacuation of Alexandria, I spent the evening in Fairfax County with relatives; my own home being only a half mile away. We were a party of young cousins all of whom were talking earnestly of the impending storm that was so soon to devastate our homes and which meant death to some of our group, and great sorrow and separation to us all. While there we were startled by the swift passage of trains and the shrieks of locomotives which told us that something unusual was taking place and warned those of us who belonged to military organizations, to join our several commands; taking a hasty leave, with sad partings for all, I returned to my home and prepared to join my company, then in barracks at Peyton's Grove at the head of King Street.

As I took my last look at my home, I thought I had never seen the place look so beautiful. The evening sun sent shafts of light through the branches of old oaks and pines, the fruit trees were all aglow with bud and blossoms, the grass on lawn and field glimmered in the

glowing sunlight. Wild flowers bloomed, roses filled the air with their fragrance and the spring song of many birds lent a charm to the whole.

After the surrender, I visited the same spot then stamped out of recognition by the iron heel of war and desolation had marked it for its own.

This is no fancy sketch, for many homes in Virginia then were but desolation, their inmates scattered and wanderers upon the earth.

Just fifty years ago as the light of day broke over the Maryland Hills and the rippling waters of the Potomac, the dip of oars was heard and a boat of armed men shot out from the Pawnee, simultaneously a rifle shot rang out on the peaceful air, this shot coming from the rifle of a sentry named Morrill, warned the old town now resting in fancied security, that the enemy was upon them. Let me break this narrative for a moment to pay a tribute to this same gallant soldier, Sergeant Morrill, color bearer of the regiment, at the battle of Seven Pines, who fell mortally wounded. The colors were caught up by Captain Fairfax and passed to color Corporal Diggs, who in turn fell wounded. From his nerveless hands, they were borne aloft by private Harper, of Company E, until the battle closed.

The U. S. steamer Pawnee lying off the town rounded too, opened her ports and prepared to cover the landing of troops from the transports. All of which was done in safety without clash of arms. Ellsworth formed his regiment of Zouaves and marching company front, up King Street with band playing and colors thrown to the breeze, halted his column in front of the Marshall House.

Then with a guard he mounted the steps and proceeded to haul down the Confederate flag that waived from the roof. Jackson surprised at the onset, rushed to the res-

cue, killing Ellsworth and in turn being killed by the guard. This was the opening tragedy of fifty years ago to be followed by endless others upon the soil of Virginia. An evacuation of the town had been agreed upon, but the entrance of the U. S. troops was premature, having notice from our pickets in time, the companies of our battalion, who were in barracks at different points rendezvoused at the corner of Prince and Washington streets, where the Confederate Monument now stands, from which they marched out of town and were sent by rail to Manassas.

The 17th Virginia Infantry became a part of Longstreet's Brigade. After Longstreet's promotion to a division, he was replaced by General Ewell, upon General Ewell's promotion, General A. P. Hill commanded the brigade, but after the battle of Williamsburg he was made a division commander, thus you see three commanders of our brigade became Lieut. Generals, commanding three army corps in the army of Northern Virginia.

The 17th Virginia infantry were in most of the great battles of the war, commencing with Blackburn's Ford, First Manassas, Williamsburg, Seven Pines, Frazier's Farm, Second Manassas, South Mountain, Antietam, First Fredericksburg, Sixteenth May Drury's Bluff, Second Cold Harbor, Dinwiddie Court House, where we lost forty men killed and wounded out of two hundred and fifty, then Five Forks, and Sailor's Creek, which practically ended our career as a regiment.

Besides skirmishes innumerable and two independent fights when isolated from the army, one was the holding of Manassas Gap for twelve hours against Merritt's Brigade of Cavalry and the other was saving the bridges over the Richmond and Danville Railway. The then

only connection between Richmond and the South, which was threatened by Kautz's Cavalry.

From the 29th of March to April 5th, 1865, we had been marching and fighting with only two whole nights rest in the ten days.

After Sailor's Creek the retreat continued night and day. The enemy with their force of 12,000 cavalry impeded our advance, hung on our flanks, attacked our rear, burnt our trains, captured our stragglers, but we still moved on without rations, with hunger doing its work, to this add the mental strain upon brain and nerves and you can realize how many like myself seemed to be walking in a kind of waking night mare, with every faculty stunned ; the retreat keeps on.

All anxiety as to safety, all fear, all hope gone except that the present might prove a horrid dream from which we would soon awake. Men sunk from sheer exhaustion, many deserted to their homes, but there was still a heroic band that fought, sometimes without organization, and the enemy's charges were checked by rattling musketry from straggling infantry or driven back by grape and cannister at short range by our artillery where isolated and unsupported.

Cavalry to the rear. ah no! To the front they rode from the lines to Appomattox, inspired by the spirit of a Stuart and led by Hampton the Lees and other kindred spirits, where duty called upon flanks or front, or rear, there their pennons waived and their bright arms flashed amid the struggling hosts.

Overwhelmed by numbers, the gallant few gave way, but to reform and charge again, and at last went down in the wreck of that grand army whose deeds will thrill the hearts of generations to come until time shall be no more.

Our time will not suffice to rehearse the last sad scenes and the last farewells at Appomattox. Let us ring down the curtain here and turn to other thoughts.

No one, however gifted, can do justice to the memory of Robert E. Lee and the men who followed him from 1861 to 1865, when the air vibrated with the trumpet's shrill call and the incessant roll of drums, when the earth shook with the rhythmic tread of armed men and conflicts fierce and bloody desolated the homes and fields of old Virginia.

To the Confederate Veteran memory for the moment lifts the veil, the hardship of the bivouac, the forced marches, the weary days of continuous conflict, the strain on heart and nerve, and the daily loss of comrades endeared by mutual dangers, pass in review, stirs the heart and makes the stagnant blood course through the veins as of yore.

To the young among you these memories are handed down as a legacy with no desire to keep alive animosity for our former foes, oh no! but to keep green the memory of a time when the tide of Virginia's manhood reached its flood, when Virginia women soothed the last hours of the wounded and the dying, in the absence of the men ruled well their homes, bid the men God speed and sent them forth to battle with smiles and cheery words that scarcely veiled their aching hearts.

Then let such memories be handed down and kept alive that future generations may know how Virginia men could dare and die, and Virginia women could suffer for a cause that was lost. Not lost will it be if their descendants but emulate the sturdy manhood of the men and the virtues of her peerless women.

What of Lee? you ask me—I cannot do him justice. To me among all of the men I have ever met he was in presence, form and bearing an ideal soldier with looks

born to command. In all my intercourse with men no one has ever so impressed me, and this is the testimony of every man who ever knew or saw him. To the men of the Confederate army he was the embodiment of all that was heroic and grand in human nature. To the old soldiers who followed him through those four years of hardship and common danger their ranks decreasing but with a faith and love unfaltering.

The soubriquet of "Marse Robert" was touching but in effect magical upon them, were they puzzled by some unexpected move, wearied and out of temper by an all night march, depressed by defeat and a retrograde movement, they would say it is all right boys, "Marse Robert" knows. It was this faith in their leader and in themselves under his guidance, that makes the deeds of the army of Northern Virginia the wonder and admiration of the civilized world.

As the history of our civil war unfolds itself, the character of General Lee is revealed in all its nobleness, he stands out among the men of this and past generations as does Mount Blanc among the Alpine peaks, towering grandly above them all and with a life and character as pure and spotless as the eternal snow that crowns its summit.

What of the Confederate soldier do you ask? The world has marked him as a hero. Rome had her Ceasar, who, with his invincible legions, bore down all Europe before them, but their motive was conquest and their reward the despoiling of the nations, which were overrun by their disciplined cohorts. Napoleon by the power of a military genious never excelled, backed by a mighty ambition, so swayed the hearts and minds of the people of France that the infantry of the Old and Imperial Guard of his army became well nigh invincible under the

magic of the cry of *Vive L' Empereur*. In strong contrast we had a soldiery fresh from the ordinary avocations of life, untried, undisciplined, badly equipped, no love of conquest or plunder, nor glamour of human ambition or glory were theirs. But the inborn love of the freeman for liberty of thought and action, love of country and fireside, made individual heroes of those ranks in gray who fought with or without organization often wresting victory from seeming defeat. And while on such occasions as this we pay our meed of praise to soldiers whose deeds of arms have never been surpassed let us not forget that it is due to the heroism of the men who wore the blue that the Confederate soldier has been made immortal.

Let us recall some feats of arms by those ragged and hungry men such as the rush of Longstreet's Corps at the "Wilderness" when first checking the line of Hancock victory almost in their grasp they were forced back with a fury irresistible, or again at the "Wilderness" they fought in that dark and almost impenetrable jungle Grant's splendidly equipped army disputing every foot of ground and strewing it with their own and the dead of the enemy.

Or again at Spottsylvania in that tempest of fire which swept the "Bloody Angle" and where the very trees swayed and fell before the shot and shell. With undaunted mien these same men, mark you, moved between the constantly re-enforced army of Grant and the Capital of the Confederacy until that last fearful struggle at Cold Harbor where the flower of the Army of the Potomac dashed itself in vain upon our lines a useless sacrifice until they refused to obey orders to advance to the attack and so ended a useless slaughter. Thus in a few short weeks Lee's army of fifty three thousand men had successfully met and foiled Grant and

his army of one hundred and twenty thousand, driving them to a change of base across the James. Grant's indomitable pluck and tenacity fairly met by Lee's masterly strategy. What a story of heroism in both armies is here depicted, no other race but the Anglo-Saxon would have stood such butchery.

The charge of Pickett's division at Gettysburg where the carnage was fearful, was only equaled in failure and loss by Grant's army in charging our lines at the second Cold Harbor. In either case we only knew somebody had blundered.

Whether we consider the Confederate soldier as a unit or *en masse* the contemplation of their unfailing courage, their willingness to merge personal thought, action, every hope in life, their self-abnegation and high sense of duty cannot fail to impress the student of history with their terrible earnestness. As sometimes watching with ceaseless vigil over sleeping comrades, as skirmishers unmasking the force and movements of the enemy as in line of battle with impetuous onset they swept over every obstacle, or broke in shattered fragments, as at Gettysburg before obstacles too great for mortal courage, they stand alone for grandeur and achievement in that high sense of personal responsibility, in military sagacity, and in unquestioning obedience before an admiring world.

A few lines written by A. C. Gordon fitly closes this address.

Where are they who marched away
Followed by our hopes and fears ;
Nobler never went than they
To a bloodier, madder fray,
In the lapse of all the years.



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With them ever shall abide

All our love and all our prayers.

" What of them?" The battle's tide

Hath not scathed them. Lo, they ride

Still with Stuart down the years.

" Where are they who went away

Sped with smiles that changed to tears?"

Lee yet leads the line of gray,

Stonewall still rides down this way :

They are Fame's through all the years !

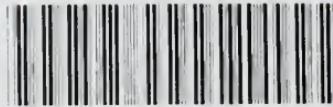
NOTE—Corse's Brigade had been thrown forward to occupy and hold Chesters and Manassas Gap for the passage of Lee's Army and to protect our trains and pontoons just being laid near Front Royal.

The Seventeenth was detailed for Manassas Gap which was held for ten hours without support.

While Gen. Grant moved on Richmond, Gen. Butler, with a large force made his demonstration against Richmond from the south side of the James. Our command was rushed up from North Carolina. Kautz's Cavalry in the mean while made a raid on the Weldon R. R., destroying the track for miles and all communication with the South in that direction. On our arival in Petersburg we were ordered by Gen. Wise to Farmville and then to the bridges on the Richmond and Danville R. R. threatened by Kautz's Raiders. We reached there before Kautz and after a four hours of hard fighting saved the bridges, thus keeping the only communication left between Richmond and the South.

The importance of these two engagements will be obvious to all military men.

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